On the Communist Party of the Philippines' support for fascistic President Duterte

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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's administration and the National Democratic Front (NDF), the legal wing of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), issued an announcement on March 11 in Utrecht that they had reached an agreement and were resuming peace talks. The five-point agreement, they stated, was arrived at through "back-channel negotiations" following the collapse of previous negotiations and the lifting of the ceasefire in early February.

The peace talks failed as a result of deliberate violations of the ceasefire agreement by both the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the CPP's armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA). Jorge Madlos, of the NPA National Operational Command, appears to be heading a faction which is opposed to the ceasefire and peace talks and is working to sabotage them.

On February 7, Duterte ordered the AFP to launch "all-out war" against the NPA. He repeated this cry on a number of occasions. On March 9, he called for the AFP to use newly-purchased jets and missiles to bombard regions allegedly held by the NPA. "If there is collateral damage," he said, "Sorry." Two days later the resumption of the peace talks was announced.

The rapid shifting, from talk of peace and coalition to all-out war and back to peace again, is a product of immense political volatility. The vulgar rhetoric and lurching political zig-zags of Duterte are less an expression of the psychology of this former mayor and death squad leader, and far more an expression of an insoluble social crisis and imminent danger of imperialist war.

Duterte's moves to reorient Philippine economic and diplomatic ties away from Washington and in the direction of Beijing have deeply destabilized bourgeois politics in the former colony of US imperialism.

At the same time, there is evidence of mounting social opposition and hostility from the working class and oppressed masses. A survey in December revealed that eight out of ten Filipinos feared for their lives or the lives of a loved one as a result of Duterte's murderous war on drugs. Over the past weekend, thousands of homeless families in Bulacan seized over 5,000 empty government homes and declared their intent to occupy them.

In this unstable situation, Duterte has sought to shore up his shaky hold on power by resting his administration on simultaneous support from the military and the CPP.

Under the auspices of his "war on drugs," which has killed over 8,000 people in the past eight months, Duterte has prepared the apparatus of military rule. He does not control the military brass, however. The generals are loyal, above all, to Washington. As Duterte has moved closer to Beijing, their loyalty to him has wavered, and they have gotten in the habit of publicly gainsaying his statements.

Duterte has relied on the CPP and its front organizations, meanwhile, to contain class tensions and mobilize support behind his right-wing agenda. The CPP selected four members to serve in Duterte's cabinet and led rallies in support of the president and his policies. It has used its role in suppressing opposition to the government to negotiate terms in the peace deal and positions within Duterte's government. Just as Duterte does not fully control his military leadership, however, it is also clear that Joma Sison, head of the CPP, does not fully control the NPA.

This is an explosive situation.

The response of the CPP and its front organizations to the mounting opposition to the social crisis gripping Philippines society and to the Duterte administration, has been to issue an appeal for "unity and struggle." Using the language of Stalinism, they called on the party and its front organizations to maintain unity with Duterte, while "struggling" with him at the same time. They are working as a loyal opposition, containing protests against Duterte, criticizing some of his policies, and calling for pressure to be brought to bear upon his government, but always concluding with support.

Thus, while in their demonstrations the CPP's front organizations now denounce Duterte as a "fascist," the Maoists remain within his cabinet. The CPP is still negotiating peace, and every rally and leaflet concludes with a call to pressure Duterte back to the interests of "the people."

Eight months ago, the CPP enthusiastically endorsed Duterte's presidency, including explicitly supporting his so-called war on drugs as a progressive measure on behalf of the poor.

This stark and grotesque political trajectory is not an aberration, but the necessary expression of the CPP's Stalinist program. A survey of the history of the CPP reveals that this is the party's standard pattern of behavior. In its half century of existence, the CPP has demonstrated that there is not a single section of the capitalist class or its representatives whom they will not endorse and, when it subsequently becomes politically necessary, decry.

The CPP and Stalinism

The CPP was founded on the program of Stalinism. The Stalinist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing, in betrayal of Marxism and the Russian Revolution, sought to secure their privileged status behind the program of "Socialism in One Country." Stalinist parties around the globe, in the name of this program, subordinated the working class to the bourgeoisie, telling them that the revolutionary tasks were national and democratic in character, and not yet socialist. They claimed that a section of the bourgeoisie would thus play a revolutionary role and could serve as a political ally. In this way, they mobilized the working class behind their enemy, the capitalists, and in return secured choice positions and a modicum of support for the interests of Moscow or Beijing. The result for the working class has always been disastrous.

In the name of this program, Sison, head of Kabataang Makabayan, the youth wing of the Communist Party, endorsed Ferdinand Marcos for president in 1965, claiming that Marcos and his Nacionalista Party represented a progressive force in Philippine society. Sison continued this support for several years, personally meeting with Marcos in 1967 to discuss economic policy and writing a public letter to the president in November of that year offering him friendly advice, which he signed

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"Very Truly Yours, Jose Ma. Sison."

In 1967, however, the Communist Party split in two. Both retained their Stalinist program, but one was loyal to Moscow and the other, the CPP—which Sison founded in December 1968—to Beijing. Marcos moved to open ties with the Eastern European bloc, and Sison and the CPP broke with him. The CPP, in keeping with the perspective of Mao Zedong, established the New People's Army to carry out a peasant war in the countryside. The NPA was, in its own founding documents, proclaimed to be a means of securing ties with a section of the bourgeoisie in a "broad national united front."

Sison and the CPP gave their full support to Marcos's leading rival, Benigno Aquino and the Liberal Party (LP). They actively campaigned for the LP in the 1971 election and repeatedly denounced Marcos as "a fascist." In return, the LP funded the CPP and its front groups and gave token support for Beijing's foreign policy interests, traveling repeatedly to China and occasionally bringing back copies of Mao's *Red Book* for Sison and his cohort.

When Marcos declared martial law in September 1972, the Moscow-oriented party embraced his dictatorship and entered his cabinet, murdering the members of their own party who opposed this policy. The bourgeois opposition to Marcos quietly acquiesced and took up life in exile.

Sison and the CPP welcomed martial law. Sison hailed its declaration, writing that "the conditions of revolutionary struggle have been tremendously enhanced." As their bourgeois allies disappeared, the CPP sought allies from among landlord class, whom they termed, "the enlightened gentry." The struggle of the working class in the cities, which had reached explosive levels before the declaration, was silenced by the military dictatorship, and the CPP directed all remaining opposition to the countryside, effectively stabilizing Marcos' rule.

In the lead-up to the Marcos dictatorship's collapse in 1986, the CPP opposed his leading bourgeois rival, Corazon Aquino, as being no different from Marcos and pursued a boycott policy in the February election—a policy initially promoted by a small section of the bourgeoisie. On Marcos's ouster, the CPP abruptly altered its line and declared enthusiastic support for the "progressive" Aquino administration, calling on workers and peasants to endorse her.

In 1987, the CPP front organizations led a march to the presidential palace of Malacañang, with placards appealing to "Cory our Hero" to grant land reform. Aquino had her troops open fire on the peasant rally, killing 13.

Only after this event did the CPP, by a split vote, break ties with Aquino and begin to denounce her as "a fascist." On her death in 2009, Sison described Aquino as an "outstanding and inspiring figure in the anti-fascist alliance." The CPP was at the time looking to form an alliance with her son.

Each subsequent election and political crisis has seen similar maneuvers and betrayals by the CPP. The party's front organizations played a crucial role in the ouster of President Joseph Estrada by constitutional coup in 2001, and the installation of Vice-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo into office. They hailed her as progressive and sought an alliance with her administration. When, in a move to stabilize her rule, she sent troops to crack down on poor protesters on Mendiola, they supported her action as the suppression of "a rabble." Within three years, as class tensions again mounted and the alliance soured, the CPP denounced her as "a fascist."

Duterte and the CPP

No development has more clearly demonstrated the rotten character of the CPP's Stalinist politics, however, than its relationship with Duterte. The party's full-throated support for Duterte was directly responsible for his rise to political prominence over several decades as mayor of Davao City, where he openly functioned as the head of the city's death squads.

When Duterte briefly withdrew from the presidential race in late 2015, the front organizations of the CPP formed an alliance with a rival candidate Grace Poe. They proclaimed her the progressive representative of the national bourgeoisie, but it was a half-hearted alliance at best. When Duterte re-entered the race, the CPP front group candidates were already running on Poe's ticket and could not back out to join Duterte.

Last May, immediately after the election, Bayan, the CPP front umbrella group, issued a statement mildly criticizing Duterte's economic agenda. Sison responded, publicly upbraiding Bayan's leadership. "You don't just attack capitalists," he stated. "We can work with nationalist capitalists even as we talk to and persuade compradors … Our honeymoon is just beginning. We're talking to him. He's offered us positions."

Less than a week after Duterte's election, the CPP's official paper, *Ang Bayan* declared that Duterte would carry out progressive policies that should be supported. From this point, the party's enthusiastic endorsement of Duterte proceeded with extraordinary speed.

As the CPP entered this alliance, the fascistic character of Duterte was already crystal clear. During his campaign, he threatened to declare martial law, and stated that his law and order campaign would leave 100,000 bodies "floating in the bay." He vowed that if workers went on strike he would kill them; he said murdered journalists "deserved to be killed."

The CPP selected four members to serve in Duterte's cabinet. They led rallies in support of his administration. In late June, Sison said a "coalition government" of the CPP with the Duterte administration was "in sight." He declared the forces of the NPA could merge with the AFP, or serve as armed guards at factories. The class outlook of the CPP could not be clearer. Sison was declaring it would police the working class at factories on behalf of the state, if peace were declared.

The CPP wholeheartedly endorsed Duterte's murderous drug war. On June 21, *Ang Bayan* wrote: "The people will completely support [puspusang susuportahan] the steps that Duterte will take to remove and punish the drug syndicates." Duterte called upon the NPA to join his war on drugs, and on July 7 the NPA excitedly declared it was "pleased to hear the appeal of the Duterte regime to the revolutionary forces to assist in his campaign."

Einstein Recedes, secretary general of the CPP's youth front organization, Anakbayan, declared on June 26: "We believe that Duterte's campaign against dangerous drugs and crime is a boon to the poor." Bayan hosted a dinner for Duterte in July, in which he announced: "If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself." Bayan had the head of the Philippine National Police, Bato de la Rosa, the man directly responsible for carrying out this murderous campaign, speak at one of their rallies. Renato Reyes, head of Bayan, eagerly shook his hand afterward and posted the image on Facebook.

As the death toll mounted, and it became apparent that a campaign of mass murder had been launched, the CPP and its front groups continued to support Duterte. Bayan's official statement in mid-July peddled the line being promoted by the Duterte administration, which pretended that the deaths were being carried out by drug dealers themselves, killing each other.

Social opposition is reaching a breaking point, however, and the CPP is scrambling to retain its influence among the masses. Vencer Crisostomo, chair of Anakbayan, told a rally this month: "Everyday it is becoming more clear that Duterte is a hangman, a fascist, and desires to become a dictator like his idol, Marcos." He did not call for a break with the Duterte administration, however. Just as the CPP welcomed martial law in 1972, so he expressed a willingness to welcome it now, stating: "Marcos was dubbed the number 1 recruiter of the NPA. Duterte may as yet beat the record of Marcos."

Sison and the CPP have played a politically criminal role in stabilizing and promoting the fascistic Duterte administration and in corralling opposition to it. This role is in keeping with the party's entire history and

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expresses its political program and class orientation.

Philippine history has already demonstrated the immense danger that martial law poses to the working class. The CPP made its declaration possible in 1972, and welcomed it. The CPP is following the precisely the same orientation today.

The Filipino working class and oppressed masses must draw the lessons of this history. There is no way that they can defend their basic democratic rights on the basis of the Stalinist program of nationalism and class collaboration. Only on the basis of the struggle for socialism, in alliance with their class brothers and sisters around world, and independent of every section of the bourgeoisie, can the Filipino working class defend its interests and its very lives from the imminent danger of dictatorship.

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